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ABSTRACT

The Western Massachusetts Five College/Public School Partnership was organized to strengthen communication and share resources among the schools in western Massachusetts and the members of a higher education consortium called Five Colleges, Inc. (comprising Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst). The Partnership is directed by a Steering Committee of faculty and administrators from the colleges and schools, and representatives from the Massachusetts State Department of Education and the Massachusetts Teachers Association. The Partnership helps organize school/college collaborative projects and connects groups with each other so that they can expand their own collaborative ideas. The projects are planned by committees of school and college faculty who share a common academic discipline or area of interest. The Partnership sponsors academic-year conferences and seminars as well as summer institutes, research fellowships, and curriculum/resource development projects. The Partnership communicates via a newsletter, an electronic bulletin board, and personal contacts. This paper describes the Partnership's staffing, structure and resources, and evaluation procedures. (JDD)

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Western Massachusetts Five College/Public School Partnership

Paper Prepared for Presentation at the American Association of Higher Education Conference "Mainstreaming Academic Partnerships"
Chicago, June 17-20, 1990

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The Western Massachusetts Five College/Public School Partnership (Partnership) was organized in 1984 to help strengthen communication and share resources between the schools in western Massachusetts and the members of the higher education consortium, Five Colleges, Inc. (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst). The purpose of this report is to provide those interested in collaborative organizations with an understanding of how this six-year old, successful partnership functions.

The report does not include a review of the literature or a history of the collaborative movement, although both will be helpful to anyone interested in collaboratives. Most helpful, of course, are the individuals associated with partnerships who are always willing to talk about the collaborative process. The Partnership is especially indebted to the American Association of Higher Education for their early support of the Academic Alliance programs initiated by Claire Gaudiani, now President of Connecticut College, their conferences on collaboration and their invaluable directory, National Directory of School-College Partnerships, by Franklin Wilbur and his colleagues. The new edition of the Directory will be released in October 1990.

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Participants/Structure

During the academic year 1990-1991 Five Colleges Inc. will be celebrating its 25th anniversary as one of the oldest and most successful higher education consortium in the country. The five member institutions include four private colleges and one public university with undergraduate student bodies ranging in size from 18,000 to 1200. There is equal diversity in the school systems in our four counties - urban, suburban, small factory town and rural - with school system size ranging from 23,000 students K-12 to 450. This diversity, both at the school and college level, has enriched our collaboration. Private and parochial school faculty also participate in all our events although no Partnership programs are planned specifically to meet their unique needs.

The Partnership is directed by a Steering Committee of faculty and administrators from the colleges and schools, and representatives from the Massachusetts State Department of Education and the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Events are planned by committees of school and college faculty who share a common academic discipline or area of interest (physicists plan events for physicists). One of our planning committees, MathWest, has now established itself as a separate organization; it is recognized as both an Academic Alliance and a chapter of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. A number of committees now include representatives from other institutions: Greenfield Community College, the Holyoke Children's Museum, Monsanto. We hope to expand this representation in the next year.

Staff for the Partnership includes a full-time administrator, two part-time assistants and college work-study students. We administer projects, develop new programs, and help link individuals who share common interests. Two part-time System Operators maintain our electronic bulletin board which provides local-call access to teachers in the three Connecticut Valley counties (Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin Counties). Berkshire County teachers can use a toll-free 800 number.

Areas of Interest

The Partnership will help organize any school/college collaborative project if there is interest and expertise at more than one college and comparable interest and expertise in the public schools. It has been our experience that such breadth of concern is essential if there is going to be any hope for long-term collaboration. In addition, we spend the equivalent of one day a week connecting groups - school, college, cultural institutions, and civic groups - with each other so that they can expand their own collaborative ideas (projects which never become official Partnership-sponsored programs). At the moment, the Partnership has projects in biology, physics, chemistry, earth science, space science, elementary science, mathematics, writing, Chaucer-Shakespeare, foreign language/technology, African Studies, Latin American Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Native American Studies, and American Studies. The process of developing our collaborative program in biology is described in an article by three school biology faculty, Robert Bieda, Richard Gibbs, and Susan Goldie, "Collaborate With Your Colleagues," published in the January, 1990 issue of The Science Teacher.

Activities/Funding

During the academic year, the Partnership sponsors conferences (release-day and Saturday) and afternoon/evening seminars. Each series (6 afternoon/evening seminars on statistics, 6 biology events including a Saturday in October, a release-day in January, and 4 Friday afternoon seminars, an African Studies afternoon/evening literature series) is presented by school and/or college faculty members who donate their time to the Partnership. We have attempted to have all seminar series partially self-supporting by charging a $20 fee for any events which include a meal (9 A.M.- 3 P.M. or 4 P.M.- 8 P.M.). The charge covers food and materials;

it does not cover publicity or administrative planning time. We have not charged for afternoon seminars which usually only include coffee/cookies and a few hand-outs. During 1989-1990, approximately 350 teachers participated in 28 events; 42 school and 46 college faculty gave the presentations.

During the summer the Partnership sponsors institutes, research fellowships, and curriculum/resource development projects. In the summer of 1990, we offered five institutes, one on each college campus:

> Love and Valor in Chaucer and Shakespeare (2 weeks, 14 participants, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, at Mount Holyoke College);
>
> Statistics in the Classroom (2 weeks, 15 participants, sponsored by the General Electric Foundation, at Hampshire College);
>
> Understanding the Native American Experience in Southern New England (3 weeks, 19 participants, sponsored by the Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island Humanities Councils, at Smith College - this is our only project which includes teachers from other areas);
>
> Partners in Writing (1 week, 8 participants, sponsored in part by the University of Massachusetts Alumni Association);
>
> NSF/SpaceMet: Space Science Project for Middle School Teachers (3 weeks, 40 participants with 40 additional participants returning for 1 week, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, at Amherst College).

All institutes continue during the academic year with a series of activities designed to rekindle the participants' enthusiasm from the summer, to provide an opportunity for them to share their experiences applying their summer learning in the classroom, and to introduce them to additional resources. Whenever possible, participants return the second summer to complete the classroom projects they developed during the school year. It is the goal of the Partnership that every summer institute include stipends for participants so that, at a minimum, child care and transportation costs will be covered. Funding for institutes comes from competitive grants (such as those listed in the 1990 summer institutes), from the colleges donate support services, and from the school systems who pay tuitions and provide substitute teachers for the academic year call-back meetings.

For the past three years, the Partnership has been able to offer Regents and Hughes Summer Research Fellowships in which school faculty join college research teams for six weeks during the summer. While the program has more than met its original goal (to provide school faculty, primarily in the sciences, with an opportunity to update their knowledge of present-day research practices), we are now expanding our goal and re-designing the program so that teachers who participate will be able to bring activities (and perhaps the necessary equipment) back to their classroom.

Finally, each summer a few groups of school and college faculty work on long-term projects: developing field guides for earth science teachers, preparing resource directories on specific topics, completing curricular projects from previous institutes (one such project from our NSF/Partners in Elementary Science institute is described in an article by Bruce Watson and Richard Konicek, "Teaching for Conceptual Change: Confronting Children's Experience," in the May 1990 issue of Phi Delta Kappan).

We value the opportunity provided by summer programs when school and college faculty are not distracted by their other responsibilities. The participants in summer programs provide our energy source during the academic year - participating themselves in activities and encouraging their sometimes reluctant colleagues to join our academic year activities.

Communication Mechanisms

The communication system within the Partnership relies on a database of school and college faculty and administrators who have indicated an interest in participating in Partnership projects. It is updated continuously. Our newsletter, The Partnership Calendar, is sent periodically to 3,000 school and 700 college faculty and administrators. Targeted mailings are sent to those who participate in specific programs e.g. 60 physics teachers, 800 teachers of writing.

Our electronic bulletin board, co-sponsored by the Physics Department, University of Massachusetts, the Partnership, and the NSF/SpaceMet project, has recently expanded so that we can now invite students, as well as teachers, to participate. Our goal in telecommunication is to:

> introduce teachers to the potential of telecommunications as a professional and classroom resource;
>
> explore appropriate ways to link our diverse and scattered classrooms around areas of common interest;
>
> enrich the regular communication between participants in our various projects.

Written communication, whether on paper or on the computer screen, strengthens personal contact, but cannot substitute for it. In addition to 6 Steering Committee meetings/year, and 2-4 Planning Committee meetings/topic/year, we try to schedule time at every conference and seminar for informal conversation and for joint planning. It is these informal, brain-storming sessions ("In the perfect world, what kinds of activities would be happening?") that often lead us to our most exciting projects.

Evaluation

The Partnership has used four different kinds of evaluation procedures designed to meet our differing needs.

During the academic year, participants at all day-long or afternoon-evening conferences are asked to completed an end-of-event questionnaire and are then mailed a 3-month follow-up questionnaire. The questions are: "How will you use what you learned today, in retrospect how could the event have been improved, what other activities should we be planning?" These are summarized by the Partnership staff and used by them and planning committees in planning events and developing new projects.

Summer institute participants complete weekly written evaluation forms and participate in a Friday afternoon evaluation discussion. They also complete a longer end-of-institute evaluation, a 3-month follow-up and participate in discussions at the recall meetings. NSF institutes include telephone interviews and classroom observations. This summarized information is used by the institute staff in planning events and by other Partnership committees in planning other institutes.

Each year the Partnership conducts a written survey of some client group: school principals, school superintendents, college faculty presenters, newsletter readers, resource directory users. Each is used by the staff and the Planning and Steering Committees to design future Partnership activities.

During the fifth year of the Partnership, the Five Colleges Board of Directors conducted a review of the Partnership, including a visit by a team of three nationally recognized leaders in school/college collaboration. Their recommendations were used by the Board of Directors (the Presidents of the Colleges, Chancellor of the University and Coordinator of Five Colleges, Inc.) and the Partnership Steering Committee in long-range planning for the Partnership.

What Makes It Work? Structure and Resources

According to the five-year review, and the observations of many inside and outside of the Partnership, the structure within which the Partnership operates is its greatest strength. That structure includes the membership of the committees, the selection of presenters, and the assumptions about the role of participants.

Committees reflect the collegial nature of the Partnership:

All Partnership committees include both school and college faculty drawn from the academic departments most intimately involved with the topic.

The members of these committees are themselves respected, senior faculty whose opinions are valued by the school/college colleagues.

Non-tenured college faculty are not encouraged to participate, beyond the level of presenting a single seminar, in Partnership activities. There are enough pressures on faculty, both at the schools and colleges, without our contributing any more. Recognizing that collaborative activities are unlikely to be adequately rewarded by any of our educational institutions, we try to provide some recognition for contributions to the Partnership through letters of appreciation and nomination for awards.

Presenters at Partnership events are selected to reflect the collaborative ethic.

Presenters include both school and college faculty.

All presenters have been selected both because they are known as outstanding teachers and because they have the appropriate expertise. Presenters are asked to talk about that which they love - to share their passion. Conversely, presenters (school or college) are not encouraged to tell others what they are doing wrong.

During the academic year all presenters at academic year events donate their time to the Partnership. This practice, which is modelled on the existing system among faculty at the five colleges, establishes a collegial atmosphere at events which helps to break down the traditional distrust between "lower" and "higher" education.

The variety of Partnership activities (a single afternoon seminar to a 3 week summer institutes with 6 academic-year follow-up activities) allows faculty to make different levels of commitment to the Partnership (from giving only one talk in six years, to serving on a committee, to directing an institute)

Presenters are drawn from different schools and colleges and from a wide range of academic departments. Although school/department of education faculty participate in the Partnership at all levels, the majority of the college faculty come from the sciences, mathematics, humanities, and social science departments.

Participants are asked to contribute, as colleagues, to the Partnership.

Time is scheduled at each event, usually over a meal but sometimes during structured discussion sessions, to share their experiences, ideas, and concerns. The differences among participants in personal-professional background, in school

organization and support, in student body, in grade level and subject area enrich to this sharing process.

Events are planned so that participants will feel that they are valued as colleagues: reading materials are sent before seminars along with maps for parking and meeting spaces, food and physical arrangements are pleasant, evaluations are distributed, collected and discussed at later events.

Most events include a mix of the latest research and discussion of practical classroom applications. (This is obviously not possible during two-hour seminars which focus on a specific topic - either research or classroom application.)

Participants are invited to increase their commitment to the Partnership (from attending individual events, to making presentations, attending a summer institute, serving on planning committees, becoming staff in summer projects)

This structure of committees, presenters, and participants has made it possible for us to make effective use of a wide variety of resources.

The Partnership is housed at the Five College Center where the Five Colleges, Inc. staff, already skilled in collaborative planning, have assisted at every stage in the development of the Partnership.

The Partnership has the support of college administrators (presidents, deans, department chairs) through Five Colleges, Inc. and school administrators (superintendents and principals) through their local professional organizations. The Coordinator maintains regular personal contact with both school and college administrators.

The Partnership is financially supported by the colleges through Five Colleges, Inc. and by donated services on each college campus. It is also supported by the school systems through academic year conference fees, summer institute tuitions, release days (substitute teachers) during the academic year, and donated services.

The Partnership has benefitted from the support of the Massachusetts State Department of Education through the awarding of competitive grants, by having their staff serve on Partnership committees and by inviting Partnership representatives to participate in state meetings and committees which link us to new resources and information on policy issues.

We have also benefitted from the support of the Massachusetts Teachers Association which was especially important in formation of Partnership - helping establish an organization that would enhance their professional development efforts. MTA representatives serve on virtually every Partnership committee.

As described earlier in this report, the Partnership's summer programs, and some aspects of the academic year program, are made possible by competitive grants. We are indebted, for both the funding provided and for the advice and support of the program officers, to the Rockefeller Foundation for the Humanities, General Electric Foundation, National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education, Title II (Eisenhower Math/Science Improvement), three state humanities councils (Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities, Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Connecticut Humanities Council), the History Teaching Alliance, the American Association of Higher Education. the University of Massachusetts Alumni Association, Massachusetts Commission on Telecommunications, and the Shaine Foundation.

In the past few years, the Partnership has added representatives from cultural institutions and the business community to its committees and has helped developed joint planning committees, the chemistry planning committee, for example now includes representatives from the Partnership schools and colleges, the Connecticut Valley Chapter of the American Chemical Society, and Monsanto. Participants on other committees have included the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Holyoke Children's Museum, the Springfield Institute for Savings, the Critical Language and Area Studies Consortium, the Springfield Museum of Science, and the World Affairs Council of Western Massachusetts. We look forward to expanding the role of cultural and business organizations in the Partnership in the next few years.

We look forward to those next few years and to exploring additional ways to fulfill our mission: to improve the education of children in western Massachusetts by developing programs that strengthen the communication and share resources between the five colleges and the school systems of western Massachusetts.